MOTHER AND SON

ROBERT NORWOOD

Edith H. Kirkwood.

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MOTHER AND SON

By ROBERT NORWOOD

MOTHER AND SON
HIS LADY OF THE SONNETS
THE WITCH OF ENDOR
THE PIPER AND THE REED
THE MODERNISTS
THE MAN OF KERIOTH
BILL BORAM

MOTHER AND SON

BY

ROBERT NORWOOD

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MOTHER AND SON
— B —
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TO TED

"This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased."

Why do we follow, like a flock of sheep,
Tradition with a crook,
Or leave the vastness of the calling deep
To paddle in a brook,
When on the hills of sunrise stands the Lord—
Triumphant with a lifted, flaming sword?

Why, when upon our lips the great, new name
Waits eager to be said,
When cloven tongues of Pentecostal flame
Burn over every head,
Do we build Babel-towers to the sky
From bricks and mortar, who have wings to fly?

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THE BOOK
of
THE MOTHER

A SONG OF MOTHERS

Know you the road to Drowsy-Dream-Town—
  Hushaby, lullaby, baby!
Over the hill and over the down—
  Hushaby, lullaby, baby!

Gold is the gate and silver the wall—
  Hushaby, lullaby, baby!
Domed are its palaces great and tall—
  Hushaby, lullaby, baby!

Good little girls and good little boys—
  Hushaby, lullaby, baby!
Find in its streets the prettiest toys—
  Hushaby, lullaby, baby!

Humming-top trees and rocking-horse stalls—
  Hushaby, lullaby, baby!
Drumstick bushes and red rubber balls—
  Hushaby, lullaby, baby!

Know you the road to Drowsy-Dream-Town—
  Hushaby, lullaby, baby!
Over the hill and over the down—
  Hushaby, lullaby, baby!

Sit there. That's his chair.
Ain't it nice! He chose the chintz.
"Always liked them coloured prints,
Same as autumn leaves," he said,
"With all that yeller, brown an' red.
I'm for colour, first an' last—
No drab for mine." But it's all past;
An' him that hankered for bright splashes
Is gone the way o' dust an' ashes.

That's that. My son Pat
Kicked off on the galler's rope!
Does you think I has a hope
O' seein' him again? No chance.
Life's not that way. It pipes the dance,
A reel or two; an', when it's over,
You finds it ain't all Pigs in Clover,
But just a groan, a gasp for breath:
"In the midst o' life we is in death."

Yesterday, he went away.
Grit to the last, he wouldn't squeal.
That might of saved him, for I feel
He didn't do the dirty work.
My son was never one to shirk,
But he'd not go so far as shootin'.
He was a yeggman, liked the lootin',
Yet swore he'd do it on the square,
An' fake his gun an' hit the air.

Who, me? Don't you see—
He was my son! I couldn't tell,
Not though he did the deeds o' hell.
He was like that before he walked,
An' swore the minute that he talked.
He heard bad language everywhere,
For in our alley people swear
To show their discontent with things—
The blame's on them that clips their wings.

Poor little feller! In a cellar
He learned to crawl while I went out
To hustle for him. Such a shout
He used to give when I come back
At end o' day to wash the black
Smudge from his face an' damp, cold hands.
Only us poor folks understands
What fills the jails. We fights in vain
To keep our kids from curse o' Cain.

In vain we fights the curse o' Cain,
With dirt an' rags our common lot.
Like flies by bloated spiders caught,
We buzz an' fuss an' cries for freedom.
"Let them flies go!" you says. "We need 'em,"
The spiders answers. "How can we
Sustain the civil polity
Without the web that we has spun,
All silver-like against the sun?"

Don't say, "There's good pay
For them that wants to earn their salt."
I tells you, 'tain't our fault
That we is poor. Don't take some case—
The lazy folks about this place—
An' argue, "They is all the same,
The loafers, they've themselves to blame."
We ain't all loafers, ain't all bad;
God only knows the luck I've had.

'Tain't fair. The folks up there
Looks down on us, an' some complains
That we is shiftless, wastes our gains.
What o' them wimmen ridin' round
The social district o' this town?
What does they do to give them right
To call us lazy? It's the sight
O' that injustice drives our men
To deeds that lands them in the pen.

My little feller in the cellar—
What chance had he to grow up good?
I had two hands, an' what I could
I done for him. I earned enough
To clothe an' feed him. He was tough,
An' stood up brave an' hard to life.
His tongue was sharper than a knife,
His eyes was steady, an' his jaw
The squarest that I ever saw.

You say, did I pray?
'Scuse me—you makes me laugh.
The rich is wheat, the poor is chaff
Blown from the grindin' stones o' fate.
God isn't, else the pearly gate
Shuts on us people in the alley
Before we travels down death-valley;
If God is, he's not on the level,
An' that would mean that God's the devil!

Poor kid, what you did—
Held up a gambler for his purse,
An' got away with—was your curse.
I warned you, son, an' did my best,
While you stood laughin', thumbs in vest,
An' said, "Ma, life's dog eat dog.
Here's duds an' grub an' coal an' grog."
That winter I was sick, an' so
He took the path that yeggmen go.

What's that? Yes, my Pat
Sold papers, did odd chores between
The age o' six an' seventeen.
He went to school an' learned his letters,
But he was never made for fetters—
No more'n a wild bird for a cage;
An' so one day Pat, in a rage,
Beat up his teacher, left the schoolroom,
An' got a job in Ikey's pool-room.

Don't think I blink
Facts in the face. I might of done
More than I did to keep my son
From takin' up the life he led,
As Hallalooja Mary said.
I did my best as I know'd how,
Grubbed hard with these two hands, an' now
What's left for me? I don't complain.
I'll see life through—come fair, come rain.

You see, seems to me
One thing is best for us to do,
Stand up to life an' see it through.
Nobody knows the reason why
We're born to suffer an' to die.
O' course there's them that has religion
An' thinks they'll make home like a pigeon,
When suddenly the door o' death
Creaks open on the dyin' breath;

But I can't lie,
An' fool myself with them that sings
O' harps an' crowns an' golden wings.
Think, if Pat was sittin' there
To-night, in his chintz-covered chair,
An' sayin', "Mother, don't you see
Hangin' did no harm to me!" . . .
Though he gambled, drank, an' stole,
What if my yeggman had a soul?

But there, I'm in the air.
Nobody thinks they has a soul;
For if they did, they'd give the whole
Caboodle o' this flesh an' blood
An' hit the trail for Jordan's flood.
If folks believed the Bible-story
O' Jesus come to earth in glory,
They'd quit the shakin' o' the sword
To take the cross o' Christ the Lord.

You know, nine years ago,
When hell broke loose with German guns,
An' Britain called upon her sons,
"Come on, me hearties, an' help France!"
Pat put on khaki coat an' pants,
An' with a grin he marched away
To train in Camp Valcartier:
A yeggman then, what was it stirred
My son when that brave call he heard?

Not all bad was my lad.
He made a record over there,
An' then they jerked him in the air—
Destroyed that splendid, brave, young thing
Because he dared to take his fling.
"But then," you says, "he broke the law."
I grants you that; but here's a draw—
Who gave man right to hang his brother?
I asks you that, an' I'm a mother!

This thing's the sting:
That men should gamble, pitch an' toss
Beneath the true Christ on his cross,
For that which every woman won
By pain o' birth—her son, her son!
For woman's is the wounded side,
An' woman is the crucified;
An' by her lonely crucifixion
O' childbirth comes the Resurrection.

Look back on the track
From man to animals an' birds.
(I lacks the easy use o' words,
But Pat an' me read lots together
O' nights when it was wicked weather.)
Whose right o' law in lair or nest
Among the creatures is confest?
On nature's harp one song is plucked:
"Blest be the paps that thou has sucked!"

I claim, man's to blame
For all the crime beneath the sun;
That woman is the only one
With power to deal with life an' death.
No king, no priest, no judge draws breath
Whose word has right, by nature's law,
To kill her child. The lion's paw
Falls gentle on the squealin' whelp,
The cub looks on the bear for help.

He was a hellion, an' rebellion
Boiled in the blood o' my son Pat;
Yet, while I'm grantin' all o' that,
My mind is on the time he came
At end o' day: a tender flame
Glowed in the eyes that looked on me,
As he stood there, full six-foot three,
Framed, like a picture, by the door,
With parcels from the grocery-store.

His eyes—say is it lies
Them preachers tell o' Peter's folly,
Who couldn't stand the gaff an' jolly
At Jesus Christ, an' through the door
Went weepin' 'cause he cussed an' swore
Against his friend who gave a look
That broke his heart? It's in the Book.
Well, I saw my son look like that,
When Judge McCarty sentenced Pat.

His eyes—how sad an' wise
They gazed upon the curious crowd
Within the court, by law allowed
To watch a human soul stript bare.
God, how I hated them, an' there
Prayed vengeance on the cruel sport
That gathered folks of ev'ry sort,
In name o' Justice, to enjoy
The mean, bull-baitin' of my boy!

No place o' doom was that court-room.
It was a crowded movie-show
To which them fiftycent-ers go
An' gets a jag by lookin' at
The torturin' o' men like Pat.
A woman used her powder-puff,
A swell pulled down his pongee cuff,
A flapper changed her chewin' gum,
When Pat got his for Kingdom-come!

The judge had a grudge,
Seemed to me, against the world.
I noticed how his thin lips curled
About them awful words he said:
"Hung by the neck till you are dead!"
He acted though he loathed his job,
An' shuddered when he heard me sob,
As if, instead o' me, his mother
Saw her lad sentenced by another.

He looked away as if to say:
"Mother, I sees you cryin' there!
Had this man half the tender care
You gave to me, an' I, instead,
His bitter cup an' broken bread,
He might be sittin' in my place,
An' mine the shame an' deep disgrace,
An' yours the wild, heart-tearin' cry
To hear your son condemned to die!

"Mother, my brother
Stands lonely at the judgment-bar!
An' on his face I sees the scar
That Pilate saw when Christ the Lord
Stood patient, while the water poured
To wash away the legal guilt
O' human blood that must be spilt;
Because the law will take its course
In spite o' Pilate's black remorse.

"Could Pilate's bowl make clean his soul?
If all the water from the sea
That Jesus loved in Galilee,
Had poured to purify the stain
On Pilate's soul, it poured in vain;
An' though he wiped his coward-hands
Upon his judge's linen bands,
An' spite of all the words he said,
Christ's blood fell down on Pilate's head."

Don't nod, for God
Comes true, when souls in sorrow meet
Before earth's judgment-seat;
An' only then, an' only then,
Walks for a little while with men!
I knows, though I has doubted Him,
Who seemed so far away an' dim,
That God was in the prisoner's place
An' pleaded of His sons for grace.

For He, you see,
Bursts like a sunbeam from a cloud
That moment when the high an' proud
Humbles themselves, an' human tears
Washes away the sin o' years.
The judge's grief, my Pat's despair,
A mother's head all white with care,
Gave God a chance; an' so we heard
Each soul's divine, unspoken word.

This thing I knows, that, like a rose,
God blooms in every human heart.
He has his thorns that prick an' smart,
But He has beauty, an' a breath
That sweetens all this place o' death
For them that takes the lonely path.
Some likes to call Him "God o' wrath";
But them that weeps beholds, above
The God o' wrath, the God o' love.

Yes, yes, I confess
Just now I said that God is not;
But then that moment I forgot
The thing that now I tells to you
O' Judge McCarty's bitter rue
Before the eyes o' my son Pat.
I railed 'cause I'd forgotten that.
How often we thrusts God aside!
I spoke in anger an' in pride.

In that court-room, the red rose-bloom
O' God's love in the human heart
Blossomed. I gave a sudden start
Towards Pat. He turned an' looked at me,
As Jesus did on Calvary,
Sayin' to John, "Behold your mother!
For she begot us, O my brother.
I am the Christ because she cried,
Who for my life was crucified."

All mothers meet before the feet
O' Cain an' Christ upon the cross;
An' by the sorrow an' the loss
O' mothers weepin' on the hill,
The strife o' nations shall be still.
The gallers an' the chair shall cease,
When women calls the word o' peace
That brings to earth the brotherhood
O' man made one through motherhood.

Not far away I sees the day—
It's comin', comin', like the spring
With apple-boughs a-blossomin',
An' little birds among the trees,
An' hummin' o' the honey-bees:
There'll be an' end o' grief an' pain,
The strife o' nations an' the strain;
When in the Lamb for sinners slain,
The world shall worship Christ an' Cain.

THE MOTHER OF CHRIST

I

It was her moment of divine delight,
That recognition of Lord Gabriel
Who comes with laughter on his mouth to tell
The great birth-secret. Feathers from the flight
Of songbirds homing to their hidden tree,
Or moonlit crystals of the falling snow,
Drift not to earth so imperceptibly
As fell these words full tenderly and low,
"All hail, Belovèd! Thou shalt bear a son
Who will be mighty through thy mother-pain.
For him thy tears will never fall in vain,
Rebuking him for that which he hath done.
Like lilies of this April Easter-time,
Straight and uplifted, shall his life be pure."
Then there was music as of bells a-chime
Within her heart, and she was very sure
Of misted splendour on a bending brow
Beneath an arch of melting rainbow-wings.
Prone at his floating feet, she made her vow
In little, breathless, broken whisperings,
"Though this thing pierce me like a sudden sword,
Angel, behold the handmaid of the Lord!"

II

Morning came, past the curtained window-pane
Beneath low eaves, to kiss her brown-gold hair
And waken her from sleep. Above the stair
A clock pealed through the sound of April-rain
That murmured on the roof. There was a stir
Among the blossoms, and a burst of song,
As though all nature felt at one with her
And those to whom the mother-days belong.
In peaceful mood she thought about her child—
Measured each moment ere he came to birth—
Counted the pain and laughed in holy mirth
That women know who have been reconciled
To sorrow, since through them the Lord of Life
Opens the little door of earth again
For souls to learn, by courage found in strife,
The path to Godhood with the feet of men.
Then she arose, looked on the blossoming
Of buds down in the orchard as the sun
Rolled back the rain. "Fairer than bloom of spring
My babe will be!" she sang; while, one by one,
The pansies in her garden-plot uncurled
Their petals to the wonder of the world.

III

She wandered down one day beside the brook
To sit again upon the wishing-stone
Where often, as a child, her heart had known
Visions too wonderful to tell—a look
Into the future. Voices from the wood,
Blent with the music of the winding stream,
Sang the Magnificat of motherhood
And lulled her to the silence of a dream . . .
The baby rolled beside her on the grass,
Played with a pebble gathered from the ground
In pride of such a treasure he had found.
Then Love held high for her his magic glass,
That she might know the innocence of eyes
Through which a soul first finds that woman's face
Whose longing lured it out of Paradise
To dare a world of sorrow for a space.
O gift of God which sanctifies the earth!
O mystery which only mothers share!
In every little babe who comes to birth,
We entertain an angel unaware . . .
She woke and whispered, "While in me is breath,
Naught shall divide us, baby mine, but death!"

IV

So day by day she lifted high her heart
Until it trembled to the day-song of the spheres
Where, throned upon the pavement of the years,
Immortal singers are. She made the art
Of Raphael and Botticelli one,
Rivalled the glory of Madonna's face—
Bending in gentle worship of her son
Whom God had given—for a heavenly grace
Comes to all mothers in a miracle
Of beauty Argive Helen never knew.
Serene and glad of life she daily grew,
Until each moment touched her with the spell
Of summer-magic wrought within the world.
She felt an intimation of the care
That nature manifests, in tendrils curled
To climb along the little arbour where
The scarlet runners flame; in pumpkin gourds
That find the furrows flooded by the sun;
In leaf and blade and bud: she watched the swords
Of bannered noon, led by the westward sun,
Strike at the shadows lurking in the wood,
As in defence of all earth's motherhood.

V

One night there stirred within her all the pain
That wakes creation, and the shrouded years
Went by—each with an unstopped jar of tears
Caught from the eyes of sorrow. In a rain
Of utter weeping, griefs both new and old
Poured from the dull and tilted earthen jars
Until that rain became a river—cold,
Swift, deep and silent. Underneath the stars
She floated out beyond familiar things—
Far, far beyond the hills of time and space—
Until she came unto a lovely place
Of voices and of laughter and of wings . . .
A woman, when in travail of her child,
Finds instant joy no man may ever know.
God gives her joy—joy pure and undefiled—
In payment of a debt that He must owe
To mothers who have done so much for Him.
What is that joy? The hands upon her breast,
And then the lips! 'Tis said the seraphim
Kneel in glad worship of the Ever-Blest,
And all the wings of flight are swiftly furled,
When woman gives a new life to the world.

VI

O mystery of mother-love—O days
Lost in the joy of giving! There is not
In any wide, star-margined garden-plot
Celestial, with beauty all ablaze
To infinite processionals of form,
One figure that so manifests the god
Resurgent from the everlasting norm,
Like woman with her babe. Again the rod
Blossoms by Jordan where the olive tree
Grows from the roots of Jesse; for each child,
Begotten of the Virgin-Mother mild,
Shares Christ's immaculate nativity.
All mothers meet the shepherds and the kings
Beside the cradle, taking gifts of gold,
Myrrh and sweet frankincense—glad offerings
From those who sit on thrones or guard the fold.
Unloose the sandals from your eager feet,
Kneel to adore, who pass along this way.
When you that moment of love's rapture meet,
Watch and be ready, bow the head and say,
As with a veil on your averted face,
"The Lord of Hosts hath visited this place!"

VII

Oft in the silent watches of the night,
Wakeful, she lay and harkened to the years
That called him from her side; and then the tears
Would fall! . . . Upon the blossom comes the blight,
And through the velvet fruitage steals the stain.
Where nature laughs a mournful echo rings,
"Laugh while ye may, for life is mostly pain—
The goshawk hovers where the whitethroat sings!" . . .
At such a moment, sometimes he would wake,
Feel for her breast with little, aimless hands,
Like moving of the wind along the sands,
And she would whisper, "Babe, my heart will break
When voices call, and you rise up to go
Forever from me!" Then the breath of morn
Would breathe upon her face, that she might know
How, out of grief, eternal bliss was born
Through mother-sorrow, ever since the earth—
Conceived and cradled in the womb of Joy—
Amid the day-song of the stars had birth;
And she would rise and hold her sleeping boy
High to the benediction of the sun,
Crying, "Thy will, O God, on earth be done!"

VIII

Eyes like her eyes looked one day on her face,
And soul met soul. "You are aware of me,
O baby mine? I am your mother!" He
Smiled back his answer. In that holy place
Were Presences. Outdoors a wood-thrush flung
His joy-peals to the movement of a bough
Swayed by the wind. Upon a petal hung
A crimson underwing. A Jersey cow
Came tinkling slowly through the buttercups.
There was a clamour in the barnyard of a cock.
Within the oval shadow of a rock
A dog lay with a litter of brown pups.
She heard a sound of scythes along the hill,
The laughter of two children by the brook
That flowed into the dam above the mill.
Yea, with the wonder of that spirit-look
When these two souls first met and understood,
Blended each, old, familiar sight and sound:
The far-off, misted green of maple wood—
A billowing of glory on the ground,
The foam of flowers rolling to her gate—
Life so expectant, holy and elate!

IX

Once when he strove to stand upon his feet
And walk, in laughter on the floor he fell.
Tender to him, she thought of those who tell
How God from His eternal judgment-seat
Would banish every soul who failed to find
The path to heaven. "I who am less than He,
Wait with the patience of a mother's mind—"
For she had learned from blossom, fruit and tree,
And all the forms of life that strive and grow
Through failure, from the things that cry and move,
Or bird or beast or man, of His great love,
Who in the driving rain and drifting snow,
Or in the dark upon all lonely ways,
Walks with His children. "Dear God understands
The feet that falter and the step that strays,
Is kind to all the lifted, helpless hands,
As I am kind to baby." Then a peace
Which comes to mothers only, filled her heart;
And she was glad, knowing love will not cease
Until all things that strive and fail are part
Of infinite perfection . . . Brave, unbalked,
The boy strove to his feet again and walked!

THE BOOK
of
THE BOY

A NEW SONG

The world waits for a new song,
A glad song, a true song—
A song without the semblance of a tear;
Full of hilltops and the heather
On a day of summer weather,
And a comrade who is infinitely near.

The world waits for a joy-song,
A girl-song, a boy-song—
A song that arrows upward like a lark
Through a sky of rain and thunder,
Till the earth is filled with wonder,
And a sword of sunrise drives away the dark.

Oh, come and sing a day-song,
A hill-song, a way-song—
A song to heal the halt and blind and dumb;
Till they rise to follow after
The wild music of our laughter,
And their glad feet make the murmur of a drum!

THE SPINNER

Something is born in me to-day—
A thought of the world and the world's way.
The world is spun
Out of the substance of the sun.

The sun is a silk cocoon
With a bit of it broken—that's the moon,
And a Spinner stands
Letting the thread run through her hands.

The zodiac is her spinning-wheel,
And the thread is wound on a pinioned reel—
Held by Venus and by Mars,
As it whirls in a belt of many stars.

The Spinner dreams while the wheel turns round;
Her dreams come true as the thread is wound.
Into the thread her dreams are spun
Out of the substance of the sun.

And of those dreams that all come true,
Give me a sky of April, blue
As this bit of a broken shell
Found last summer where it fell

Under the robin's nest—empty now,
Where it swings like a cradle on the bough:
Give me an April-sky, and then—
Give me my boyhood back again!

Mystical Spinner, to me it seems
Mine are the best of all your dreams;
Therefore I sing while my days are wound
Into the world, as your wheel turns round.

A house, a barn, a garden: these
Are my earliest memories
Dreamed by you, Spinner, as you spun
Earth from the substance of the sun.

Little brown house, do you feel sad—
Lonely for the love you had,
And empty, too, like the robin's nest?
I come back to you for rest.

Under your gable-thatch two eyes
Study me now, with a tender, wise
Look, as of one
Studying the features of her son.

Study me hard and search me through,
For I was never afraid of you:
Here in my heart is an ancient thing—
Need of the chick for its mother's wing.

I come wearily back,
Over the undulating track
Worn by the feet of those who find
Peace on the home-trails of the mind—

Trails that lead from a hill of years,
Gashed by the torrents of old tears—
Back to a boyhood's love of you,
House in a sky of April-blue.

Four square panes my window make;
Through it I look when I awake.
The sun is high above the hill
Where all the trees are standing still,

Like soldiers on a dress parade.
The trees are very much afraid
Of Captain Sun, and so am I;
His blue cloak is an April sky.

I open the window and look out,
I am so happy that I shout.
Comes a joyous answer—hark!
He's under the window, that's his bark.

O little, brave comrade, black-and-tan,
Call to the boy, dismiss the man
Fretted and worn. I come to you
Under a sky of April-blue.

A jug of water, an old, cracked bowl,
Bid me be clean of body and soul;
And, as I splash with reckless hands,
Something within me understands

How body and soul together seem
Part of the dreamer and her dream—
How body and soul together run
Out of the substance of the sun.

Into the bowl I dip my face.
Glory of God and Christ's fair grace
Come with the water, and I see
John at the river in Galilee:

God, in the water clear and cold—
Christ, in the white towel that I hold—
John, in my body rubbed and dry,
The prophet of an April-sky.

Grey wool shirt and stockings, too,
Little patched trousers faded blue,
Hobnailed boots with cowhide strings—
You are such transcendent things!

Glorious robes of the martyred saints,
With haloes and harps that the artist paints,
Mean no more to God up there
Than these little-boy things I wear;

For I know that all things blend
Into the dream, and, I contend,
Hobnailed boots and harps are spun
Out of the substance of the sun.

Spinner, retard your wheel awhile.
Slow on the thread, there. Do you smile?
Cain or Christ, it is all the same
Stuff of your dream—what's in a name!

Unwind your thread to my April-day.
I have so much to see and say,
And what I see of myself is blent
With the blue of your far-away firmament.

House of my father, is he here?
Speak to me, speak to me, mother dear.
God of the living, are you able
To spread for me my breakfast-table?

I want the old-time, morning chatter
To click of spoons and teacups' clatter;
The clock upon the wooden shelf
Between two dogs of shiny delf;

The oval mat upon the floor
Between the dresser and the door;
The window where, whatever comes,
Bloom mother's red geraniums.

For you have dreamed the things I name,
And on your spinning-wheel of flame
My day of April-blue have spun
Out of the substance of the sun:

The sun that is a silk cocoon—
A bit of it broken, called the moon;
And over your arm the thread is curled
For the pinioned reel that winds the world:

The world that is coloured by what you dream—
Tragedy, laughter, gloom and gleam;
Till the last soft thread of your task is spun,
And there is no more moon and no more sun.

ADVENTURES

Sing a song of swimming,
On a summer noon,
Diving down the deep pool
Like a startled loon;
When the shadows lengthen,
He will try for trout!
Know you of a nicer thing
For him to be about?

Sing a song of willows
Back of Taylor's barn,
Where the creepers tangle
Like a lot of yarn;
Watch him make a whistle
From a yellow branch!
Was it skill he slipped the bark,
Or was it merely chance?

Sing a song of cat-tails
High above the beach,
Where the frightened sea-gulls
Rise up with a screech;
Watch the ocean-hollows
Lift along the shore
To the skirl of cobblestones,
And be a boy once more.

Sing a song of apples
Red among the grass,
Near enough to touch them
Slyly as you pass—
Is it wrong to take one
On the way to school?
Oh, the fun of feeling for
The windfalls wet and cool!

Sing a song of haymows
On a day of rain,
When the smell of clover
Mingles with the grain:
Doll and Dot and Dainty
Stamp within their stalls—
Oh, it's fun to do the chores
In daddy's overalls!

PORT O' NIGHT

Sail down, cloud-ship,
The coast o' sky
With sails that dip
Like wings that fly;
The sunset banner streams astern
Above your wake where bubbles churn.

Luff now, and ride
That he may climb
Your crimson side.
'Tis slumber-time,
And he would sail with you away
To Port o' Night from Port o' Day.

The pine-tree on
The hilltop high,
O Galleon
Out of the sky,
He'll make a ladder to the rail
Beneath the belly of that sail;

That sail which puffs,
Then flattens out,
Just like the ruffs
On his surtout—
O linen free of any fleck—
The Captain's on your quarter-deck.

The far sky-space
Of paling blue,
Has now no trace
Of rocks of rue:
Those shifting reefs of reckoning
Of which the Argive sailors sing.

Mayhap the doom—
Medusa's eyes,
Green in the gloom
Below the skies—
Glares in the bending Scorpion;
But he will do as men have done,

Who dared their dread
And faced their fears
Down where the dead
Weep wasted years—
Above the ground where flowers grow,
And which they lost so long ago.

Mayhap, O ship,
A sunken rock
Will break and strip
You, like a stalk
Of barley broken by the wind,
Among the fabled Isles of Ind.

The Odyssey
Had not been sung;
And history
In every tongue
Would be a dead, unwritten word;
Had men by peril been deterred

From their emprise:
Adventure bold
Beneath the skies
Through gates of gold,
That open slowly, one by one,
When dreams begin at set of sun.

When dreams begin,
The hero-soul
Wakes up to win
The destined goal
That lies where sunset-colours fade
Within a sky of margined jade.

Let no man mock
A dreaming boy;
With laughter shock
His faith; destroy,
With logic of reality,
Earth's loveliness and mystery.

Among the trees
Gautama dreamed;
And Socrates,
Whom men esteemed,
Back in his boyhood found those words
That soared and sang like homing birds.

Take from the bank
Of Avon's stream,
That first in rank
Of those who dream
In boyhood what as men they are,
We would not follow Shakespeare's star—

The star that rose
Upon his head
At birth. Who knows,
When all is said,
What prophet-voices logic stills,
What lords of music laughter kills?

So come, cloud-ship,
Come to this boy
Who waits to slip
From things that cloy;
Take him aboard and sail away
To Port o' Night from Port o' Day.

MIRACLES

Take me back to boyhood
When the taste of things was new,
(Oh, the berries on the bushes near the wall!)
When God came down in laughter
On the little drops of dew,
Glad to be the comrade
Of the tender things that grew—
Tiny, tender things that answered to His call.

Let me have the colour
Of the morning sky in June,
(Oh, the clinking of the battered berry-pail!)
High above the pasture
Just beyond the yellow dune,
Where the katydids are calling
In a reedy, sleepy tune,
And far out upon the ocean dips a sail.

Give the lure of pine-woods
And their mystery of moss.
(Oh, the ferns that grow abundant by the brook!)
Give the smell of thistles,
With their cups of silver floss,
Growing on the cow-path
With a bridge a boy must cross
To the place where he would loiter with a book.

Heal the sense that sickens,
Heart that has grown dull and stale;
(God, let me be converted back to joy!)
Work for me Thy wonders,
Miracles that never fail:
Sky, clouds, land and water,
And the berries in the pail
Of a freckled and barefooted, truant boy!

THE BOOK
of
THE MAN

THE PATH

Which way does He call me?
I will follow,
Whatever befall me,
Through the hollow,
Up the hill;
Down by the shore and over the sea,
I will follow—follow His will.

What does He ask of me—
Is it laughter
Set for the task of me,
With the tears after;
Pleasure or pain?
Only one thing before me I see:
The task that He gives me to gain.

THE ANOINTED

Give me the faith that Archimedes had,
Who pondered deeply of a balanced beam
To lift the world. What! think you he was mad,
Or talking as one babbles in a dream?
Was it a dream? Nay; through the quickened blood
Of such a man runs that new rapture known
By one who, ages ere the glacial flood,
First, in defence of life, heaved high a stone
And hurled it bravely at the sabre-tooth,
Lurking to tear the woman and the child—
Hurled it and slew him as he sprang! Forsooth,
The gods have ever on the dreamer smiled,
Have waited till he dared his many dreams
Of great adventure—fulcrum, lever, stone.
Always they wait; and when new glory gleams,
Where once was darkness, like a moon-ray thrown
Upon wild water, lo, the gods are glad.
Be, then, the folded wings of thought unfurled
To dare the untried spaces of the sky.
Challenge the ancient terror. Lift the world,
Though, on the sturdy beam, men crucify
The hands that pressed only to place earth far
Beyond the glitter of the highest star.

THE WHITE BROTHERHOOD

I DREAMED a dream of angels,
More beautiful than they
Who fold their wings and play
On harps, before a throne,
In an unending tone.

I dreamed a dream of angels
Who had no scarlet wings,
No harps of many strings;
Glad ministers of man,
They on his service ran.

In them there was no beauty
Of which the poets sing,
No splendour of a king,
No unction of a priest;
Of lowly they were least.

Upon their wounded foreheads
There was no mystic sign,
That one might so divine
How high their service stood
In God's White Brotherhood.

I dreamed a dream of angels
Who hide among the meek,
And for the fallen seek:
Those very lowly ones
Who are God's dearest sons!

A GREETING

Give you good day,
  The clasp of a hand!
Whither away?
  "To my lonely land."

What have you done
  That you have no eyes
For the noon sun?
  "Companioned with lies."

You are afraid!
  Friend, why do you start?
"I have betrayed,
  Have broken a heart."

Where doth he live,
  And what is his name?
He will forgive,
  Love's ever the same.

"You I betrayed—
  Fool, let me go by,
For I have made
  Much love to a lie!"

Yet you loved me
  So dearly of yore!
"Fool, can't you see
  I loved myself more?"

AVATARS

Sorrow has made you sad
And life is hard to bear;
Though last night you were glad,
To-day is dark with care.

You walk with lagging pace
Because, a while ago,
One with averted face
Passed—why, you do not know.

Your heart is like a stone,
Your mind has broken wings,
You go the way alone
Among life's scattered things.

Know you the reason why,
Or is your vision sealed,
Until across the sky
A glory is revealed?

This pain of empty days
And grief for love denied;
This walk in lonely ways
Among the dreams which died

Are your eternal choice,
That, from earth's broken chords,
You may lift up your voice
With those celestial lords

Whose singing made the suns,
Whose passion brought to birth
God's incarnated ones—
His avatars of earth.

Take sorrow from your day,
Drive pain out of your heart,
And you will throw away
Your spirit's better part.

A BALLAD OF TREES

I WENT riding through the rain
Down the wet rails on a train;
And upon the misted pane
Moving pictures of the trees—
Films of fancy, leafless trees,
Miracles and mysteries—
Grew, as I rode through the rain.

Past the pools and twisted streams—
Blurs and blotches, tangled gleams—
I went riding, till my dreams
Grew to great realities;
And a miracle of trees
Happened in the harmonies
Of the rising wind and rain.

Then I knew that, long ago,
Ere this earth was white with woe,
God the Father loved it so
That He asked the merriest
Of His angels, and the best,
To go down to earth as trees,
Lest it lose His harmonies.

So they circled down the sky
To be trees, that you and I,
When we want to weep and cry,
Might know laughter such as they
Who in tall trees laugh and play;
Lest we lose, through grief and pain,
Soul to sing against the rain.

PENNY A DAY

A VINEYARD my dear Master hath
  On the slope of a hill;
The way to it is a narrow path
  By the stone of a mill:
Within the quiet of that cool place
His branches climb, with a lovely grace,
Their cedar stakes that lift them high
From the moist, brown furrows to the far, blue sky.

The walls are a hedge of prickly pear.
  Wild columbine
Borders the path. Sweet peas are there.
  The sturdiest vine
May climb on its stake above the wall
To see why the busy sparrows call . . .
Look at the Master coming through
The gate of the vineyard after you!

"Why do you wait at the broken mill,
  Or at the market-place?
Come up to my vineyard on the hill,
  You of the stricken face!
Walk with me, work with me down the rows,
Trimming and training the vine that knows
Crosses are meant to lift one high
Over the hedge to the far, blue sky.

"Work and the intimate sense of things—
  Soul of the earth in branch and vine,
Joy of a bird in outspread wings,
  Shall be yours. I give of what is mine.
Work and the wage of the hardened hand
Shall be wisdom of heart to understand
How each lone stake leads my grapes up
To the sweet, red wine in the great, gold cup."

A PSALM OF DEGREES

Lay hold on life through all the years
That lift like mountains out of mist;
Behold, O drunken with your tears,
Their crowns of gold and amethyst!
Each is a king upon his throne;
Go forth and claim what is your own.

Lay hold on peace and joy and power
That rise to flight on wings of pain;
Learn of the birds at morning hour
How songs are made within the rain,
Or, of the April tulip-rows,
How beauty into blossom blows.

The leaves are symbols of your soul,
The trees are prophecies of birth
Through which you pass from goal to goal,
Until the boundaries of earth
Are widened to the waiting suns—
Your spirit's many myrmidons.

MY FRIEND

I HAVE a friend whom I have known
These many laughing years;
Sometimes his raiment is wind-blown,
And sometimes wet with tears.

But often he is crowned with light,
And his blue eyes are glad;
He strides in majesty of might,
And like a king is clad.

He runs to waken me from sleep
And never goes away,
Until the stars come out to keep
Watch for my dear friend Day.

DUSK

Sometimes I think the lilac dusk
Smells of faint rosemary and musk,
As from a silken garment falls
The breath of vanished balsam balls—

A gown my lady used to wear
With blossoms tangled in her hair,
And now no more may put it on,
Because her errant love has gone.

I think there is a vast regret
Of Nature, when the sun has set;
And dusk is like a lilac gown
Worn by the beauty of the town,

Whose little feet may dance no more
Upon the shining ballroom floor,
Because her lover left to go
On paths which she could never know.

So Nature folds her gown away
When she has lost her lover Day!

THE SECRET

I HAVE a secret I would tell
Only to those who harken well;
So listen, if you want my word
Of that which I have lately heard:

Last night I stood beneath the sky
And marvelled that it was so high;
That Sirius and the Northern Crown
Move there, yet do not tumble down.

This morning I rose out of bed,
So early that the sun was red
And like a ball above the hill;
I wondered then, and wonder still,

"What if he lost his way and ran
Pell-mell upon Aldebaran?
How is it there are never jars
To spoil the friendship of the stars?"

So, musing on these many things,
I heard a tumult as of wings;
And looking up, I saw a face
Of an eternal, tender grace.

I knelt in meekness on the floor,
I knelt in meekness to adore;
And then the angel laughed and said,
"Brother o' mine, lift up your head,
Be not afraid to meet my gaze;
Only on earth are there lost ways."

A HYMN TO YOUTH

I saw them in a cluster, as of stars
When suddenly the closed doors of the sky
Are opened on a night of wind and rain;
And where was only bitterness of pain
Came peace of vision, came the dreams that fly
Swift in their eagerness to heal the scars
Time cannot heal, and laughter binds in vain.

I was unhappy, like a wakeful one
Turning and tossing on a sleepless bed.
I held the lips of sorrow to my heart,
And suckled it with tears—sad tears that start
From memories of laughter that is dead;
As, when the day dies with the fading sun,
Beauty disdains the ardent eyes of art.

I held the lips of sorrow to my breast
And suckled its unheeding youth with tears.
Lamenting all my loneliness and grief,
I spurned each gentle offer of relief.
Proud in my anguish, I withstood the years
That marshalled memories, as though to test
The pride of one who of the proud was chief.

Yea, I was proud of sorrow, proud of pain,
And stared God coldly in the face, gave Him
Back look for look, and said, "Behold your deed!
I am bereft and wounded. Watch me bleed
Without a murmur. Yours the cruel whim—
The awful jest that robbed me. I disdain
Your deity so passionless and dim.

"He who was gentle, kind and true and brave—
Why did you take him, God, take him away
From all that he held beautiful and dear?
He loved the gradual changes of the year,
And, like Apollo, sang throughout the day;
Now, covered by the blanket of a grave,
The gossip of the birds he cannot hear.

"He cannot rise at morning, clean and strong,
To plunge his pliant body in the lake,
Dress, taste with joy the sacrament of food,
And go about his work.—A lifting rood,
You say, is what you gave your son? How long
Must you bruise bodies and sad hearts that break
With bitter weeping for salvation's sake?

"You gave your son a rood! and did you cry,
As I am crying, sleepless on my bed?
Since you are God and I am only man,
The odds are with you, Lord of Caliban.
Your son forsook the cross and found the sky,
But mine is taken from me, mine is dead."
And then God answered—this is what He said:

"I have claimed you by sorrow, weeping one.
He is not dead. He only went away
With dancing feet of laughter to regain
Eternity. So pay your price of pain,
That gives me back the spirit of your son
Who found by death the fulness of the day,
And from this bitterness of tears refrain.

"Youth needs the hallowed wisdom of your years,
Your strength and understanding, tenderness;
For youth is lonely, lost, and needs a guide
Across life's waste of desert vastly wide.
Youth follows a mirage, and in its stress
Of thirst finds but a fountain filled with tears.
Give youth your love by sorrow sanctified."

And then I saw them glorious with light,
As stars grouped in great constellations, spread
Through all the far infinitude of space:
I saw the young, so eager for the race
Life sets before them—challenging—and said,
"Brave, glad adventurers, who dare the night
That we call Day, all hail! There are no dead."

EVEN SONG

Hold your dream and keep your song,
Brave upon the highway;
If you will be only strong,
Your way shall then be my way:
Shun the tavern, go past the gate—
What do we care if the hour is late,
When God, and you, and I together
Sleep in the night on the gorse and heather?

Hold your dream and keep your song,
Though the sun is setting:
Day is short and night is long,
Sleep is fine forgetting:
Turn from the lure of the lighted town,
Breasting the hill and daring the down,
Heather and gorse are good for a bed,
And the stars are plenty overhead.

THE END